# **Social Media Quandary**

## **Description**

**This simulation has three scenarios from which to choose**, each with different levels of difficulty. All scenarios involve ethical and procedural challenges that require communication among members of a start-up social media company. The focus is on problem-solving, conflict resolution and ethical decision-making in a start-up company.

## **Notes to Facilitator**

This simulation can support three to six participants, depending on class size, with at least one participant assuming each role. To prepare participants for the role play, we suggest starting with a warm-up exercise in which each participant introduces themselves in role (see Warm-up Exercise below). Note: depending on the size of the group, you may consider having participants respond to your prompts during the role play.

What are your learning objectives for this exercise or course? What prompts could you add to extend or expand the simulation in that direction? What additional resources or assignments might you add?

### *Preparation*

Prior to the simulation, ensure participant contact information (e.g, emails, selected chat platform, or phone numbers for texting) is easily accessible on a list that includes their assigned roles (see [Appendix A: Sample Role Chart](#_Appendix_A)). During the simulation, you will need to contact certain characters, so advance planning is helpful. If online, you can copy and paste prompts using email or a chat function. If delivering the simulation in person, you could continue to use email or chat for hybrid delivery, or use cue cards or slips of paper to communicate. Not all characters will receive correspondence from the facilitator(s) in role; those with privacy concerns can be assigned non-contact roles. Be aware of your organization’s PIPA position. **Discuss privacy issues in advance and modify accordingly.**

## **Foundational Scenario**

You are a **new social media consulting company** with a core group of three to six people (depending on the size of the class and groups). You have been **contracted by an international fashion company,** Phoebe’s Closet, to manage their social media input/output, and to advise their marketing department. The company is your biggest contract, providing you high-profile status and most of your income. You have dedicated almost all of your resources to support this contract.

Phoebe’s Closetprides itself on its equitable production of clothing, from the environmentally sound manufacturing of materials to fair labour practices. To bolster their connection to the youth market, the company created an uncontracted relationship with a **highly popular social influencer, Kelly-Anne,** who lives in London, England. You have yet to connect with Kelly-Anne, though this is a high priority on your list of things to do. Also, the marketing team you are working with has very little experience with social media outreach and requires your support and advice.

## **Warm-up Exercise for all three scenarios**

Once roles are given to the participants, ask them to use their actual first names and come up with the name of their social media company while in role. Also ask them to provide some of their previous experiences with social media.

## **Scenario 1**

*Warm-up recommended before starting.*

Through a panicked email from a member of the Phoebe’s Closet’s marketing team, it comes to your attention that an online rumour is circulating that Phoebe’s Closet has been “keeping in its closet the dirty truth about how it manufactures its products – SWEATSHOPS!!!!” The marketing team member says that the rumour is from a disgruntled employee, and that there is no element of truth to this rumour. Due to the time zone difference, Kelly-Anne has not yet read this rumour, but likely will shortly.

1. Strategize how to proceed. Whom should you contact first–the Phoebe’s Closet marketing team or Kelly-Anne? What other options should you explore?
2. Depending on who you choose to contact, decide as a group how you will word your message.
3. Discuss the importance of your social media company’s contract with Phoebe’s Closet, both monetarily and ethically.

[**Watch a Video Example with Learners of Scenario 1**](https://youtu.be/uY3xt5Zb3WA)

## **Scenario 2**

*Warm-up recommended before starting, unless it has already been done during the session.*

Through a panicked email from a member of Phoebe’s Closet’s marketing team it comes to your attention that an online rumour is circulating that Phoebe’s Closet has been “keeping in its closet the dirty truth about how it manufactures its products – SWEATSHOPS!!!!” Before you can get ahead of it and let Kelly-Anne know you are aware of this, she posts the following message:

Hey people, guess what I just heard? Phoebe’s Closet is using sweatshops to make its fashions! I am so pissed! I feel foolish because I believed their hype, when I should’ve verified their claims myself! I’ve been supporting this company because I BELIEVED they were flying in the face of fast-fashion. Now I hear from a former employee that they’re no better than the rest of the big corps. Proof that you can’t trust anyone these days!!!

No one from your team has spoken to Kelly-Anne, nor has anyone from Phoebe’s Closet’s Marketing team contacted you. You don’t know if the rumour is true or not.

1. Strategize how to proceed. Whom should you contact first–the Phoebe’s Closet marketing team or Kelly-Anne? What other options should you explore?
2. Depending on who you choose to contact, decide as a group how you will word your message.
3. Discuss the importance of your social media company’s contract with Phoebe’s Closet, both monetarily and ethically.

**For facilitator:** Allow the groups to discuss the situation for a few minutes, and then communicate with one participant (your choice) the following message: *“This is Phoebe’s Closet Marketing. Dump that Kelly-Anne once and for all!”*

[**Watch a Video Example with Learners of Scenario 2**](https://youtu.be/xZTnhTs8nEw)

## **Scenario 3**

*Warm-up recommended before starting, unless it has already been done during the session.*

Kelly-Anne, the influencer, has posted:

I’ve done some research and found out Phoebe's Closet has been using sweatshops for certain clothing items--like the cute T-shirt I have in my closet RIGHT NOW! Even if it is only one item, I feel betrayed. I’ve supported this company, promoted their fashion as a righteous alternative for those of us who care. Now I feel lied to. I don’t know what to say right now.

To make matters worse, the CEO of Phoebe’s Closet has sent out the following Tweet:

What does a person who’s been happy to receive free clothes from us, and doesn’t employ hundreds of hard working people like we do, know about betrayal?

Up to now the relationship between Kelly-Anne and Phoebe's Closet has been informal and based on goodwill. You know they were in early talks to draw up a contract formalizing their working relationship. Your team was planning to contact Kelly-Anne for the first time today to express how excited you were to be working with her in an official capacity. You are responsible for the public’s perception of Phoebe's Closet on social media. What will you do?

1. Strategize how to proceed. Whom should you contact first–the Phoebe’s Closet marketing team or Kelly-Anne? What other options should you explore? Where do you throw your allegiance?
2. Depending on who you choose to contact, decide as a group how you will word your message.
3. Discuss the importance of your social media company’s contract with Phoebe’s Closet, both monetarily and ethically.

**For facilitator**: Allow the groups to discuss the situation for a few minutes, and then communicate with one participant (your choice) the following message: “*This is Phoebe’s Closet Marketing.* *What a mess. We were so close to signing a contract with Kelly-Anne. And between you and me, I’m 99% sure we made a mistake and did use a sweatshop once. What should we do?”*

**[Watch a Video Example with Learners of Scenario 3](https://youtu.be/G_XNLlQ8MuM)**

## **Debriefing**

*Note: Debriefing is done* ***in role*** *either in groups or as a whole class.*

### Interpersonal

* Who took initiative or was it shared by all? Could it be said that an informal leader naturally emerged?
* Did you actively listen to one another? Were there sometimes challenges being heard?
* How open was your team in changing their perspectives and adapting to new information?

### Issues

* Due to the changing situation, did secrets emerge both internally as a group and externally with others?
* Regarding your social media start-up, what company and personal risks were articulated? Did these influence possible future actions?
* How great a factor was your company’s reputation in your deliberations and decision making?
* As your group discussed possible courses of action, did you encounter any loyalty, transparency, honesty and/or ethical boundaries?

## **Extensions**

* Watch the scene [*What’s News with You?*](https://youtu.be/f5WAGnAvJaA) from “[Adult Education: Community Development](https://mirrortheatre.ca/performance/adult-education-community-development-2013/)”:
  + What roles does social media play in other people’s lives? What power do they hold?

## **Assignments**

The following suggestions could be undertaken either as a group or individually. They could be written as reflections, offered for discussion, or submitted as assignments for grading.

1. What are the descriptors of a well-functioning team? What structural and personal characteristics can foster or impede a well-functioning team?
2. Compose Tweets or social media posts from the perspectives of Kelly-Anne, Phoebe’s Closet, or your social media company in response to the scenario. Annotate it with reasons for your specific word choice and phrases, discussing the pros and cons of your choices.
3. Depending on who you choose to contact, how will you word your message?

## **Readings**

[Belbin, M. (2022). The Nine Belbin Team Roles.](https://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles)

Campbell, D. T. (1976). Assessing the impact of planned social change. *Occasional Paper Series, 8*.

[TherapistAid.com. (2015). Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills.](https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/dbt-interpersonal-effectiveness-skills.pdf)

Tuckman, B. (1965). Development sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin, 63*, 384-399.

[Venditti, P. & McLean, S. (2012). *An Introduction to Group Communication*.](https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/an-introduction-to-group-communication/index.html)

## **Appendix A**

Sample Role Assignment for Establishing a Productive Interprofessional Team

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Insert Actual Name | Group | Role | Scenario | Contact Information |
| Donald Westphali | 1 |  |  |  |
| Vijay Kochar | 1 |  |  |  |
| Jack Morrison | 1 |  |  |  |
| Annie Cavanero | 1 |  |  |  |
| Ellen Craig | 1 |  |  |  |
| Faith Yee | 1 |  |  |  |
| Shirley Daniels | 2 |  |  |  |
| Philip Chandler | 2 |  |  |  |
| Mark Craig | 2 |  |  |  |
| Paulette Kiem | 2 |  |  |  |
| Neela Rasgotra | 2 |  |  |  |
| Robert Romano | 2 |  |  |  |
| Yosh Takata | 3 |  |  |  |
| David Morgenstern | 3 |  |  |  |
| Chuny Marquez | 3 |  |  |  |
| Meredith Grey | 3 |  |  |  |
| Cristana Yang | 3 |  |  |  |
| Derek Shepherd | 3 |  |  |  |
| Lexi Grey | 4 |  |  |  |
| Callie Torres | 4 |  |  |  |
| Agnes Kao | 4 |  |  |  |
| Helen Sharpe | 4 |  |  |  |
| Vijay Kapoor | 4 |  |  |  |
| Jackie Peyton | 5 |  |  |  |
| Gloria Akalitus | 5 |  |  |  |
| Zoey Barkow | 5 |  |  |  |